

Employer attractiveness from a generational perspective: Implications for employer branding

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RESUMO

Atratividade do empregador na perspectiva geracional: implicações para o *employer branding*

Este estudo teve por objetivo identificar os fatores de atratividade do empregador priorizados por diferentes gerações: *Baby Boomers*, Geração X e Geração Y. A pesquisa foi realizada com uma amostra de 937 profissionais, atuantes em diversas áreas e empresas, em sua maioria gestores e com alto nível de instrução. Foi adotada a Escala de Atratividade do Empregador de Berthon et al. (2005) e os resultados indicam que, ao escolher uma empresa, as gerações estudadas apresentam especificidades em relação aos atributos de atratividade que priorizam. Também se observou que a geração Y é a que mais nitidamente discrimina e hierarquiza tais atributos. Possíveis implicações para o *employer branding* e limites da pesquisa são discutidos ao final do artigo.

Palavras-chaves: atratividade do empregador, recrutamento, gerações, *employer branding*.

Recebido em 09/dezembro/2014

Aprovado em 25/novembro/2015

Sistema de Avaliação: *Double Blind Review*

Editor Científico: Nicolau Reinhard

DOI: 10.5700/rausp1226

1. INTRODUCTION

Attracting potential candidates is a significant issue in the recruitment process, since it involves how companies compete for often scarce skills in the labor market (Collins & Kanar, 2013; Fernandez-Araoz, Groysberg & Nohria, 2009; Hewlett & Rashid, 2010). In this context, organizations may attain differentiation and become more competitive in attracting talent through Employer Branding (EB) initiatives. By effectively communicating an employer's unique and positive aspects and the corresponding employment value proposition, EB strategies contribute to increase employer attractiveness in the labor market as a whole and, more specifically, among potential skilled candidates (Backaus & Tikoo, 2004; Collins & Kanar, 2013; Edwards &

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Edwards, 2013; Pingle & Sharma, 2013). Nevertheless, despite this increasing visibility and relevance for companies, there are few academic studies on the EB subject (Sokro, 2012). Moreover, literature has been mainly focused on concepts and results obtained through EB; research on the employer attractiveness dimensions used in EB strategies is still scarce (Biswas & Suar, 2014). Thus, one of the contributions of this paper is to investigate the employer attractiveness dimensions.

The arrival of new generations of professionals in organizations has the potential to promote challenges to the policies and practices related to the management of people. Preferences and motivations concerning work may be different for each generation, and would require adjustments in people management practices (Amaral, 2004; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008), especially in the recruitment and retention processes. Indeed, literature has reported that different generations tend to prioritize different elements in the workplace (Terjesen, Vinnicombe & Freeman, 2007; Twenge, 2010). This seems to be valid for Generation Y, for example, who have shown quite peculiar characteristics when compared to previous generations, such as, for instance, greater interest in new technologies, the fact they were already born “digital” (Prensky, 2001) and their wish for fast career development (Tapscott, 2010; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Besides, other generations (such as the Baby Boomers and Generation X) may also have peculiarities (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Jurkiewicz, 2000) and, therefore, different expectations regarding potential employers. Identifying these specificities can contribute to set EB strategies. However, most studies on generations have focused on aspects such as personality traits (Twenge & Campbell, 2008), values (Parry & Urwin, 2011), career expectations (Ng, Schweitzer & Lyons, 2010), among others. Very little research has investigated the employer attractiveness factors’ preferences by the various generations. Therefore, we tried to address this shortcoming by conducting a research with the purpose of answering the question: “Which are the employer attractiveness attributes prioritized by different generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y?”

Although authors have defined generations differently in terms of birth years, we chose to define generations as in Miller (2011), Brosdahl and Carpenter (2011), and Bolton et al. (2013): Baby Boomers refer to people born between 1946 and 1960; Generation X, those born between 1961 and 1981; and Generation Y comprises those born between 1982 and 2000. A survey was conducted with a sample of 937 professionals working in various areas and companies, from different age groups, most of them managers and having a high education level. Among the contributions of this paper, it is worth mentioning a better understanding of the EB and the attractiveness attributes concepts, and their usefulness in attracting desired candidates in recruitment processes.

This article contains six sections, besides this introduction. In the literature review, the generational issue, the concepts of

employer attractiveness, attractiveness attributes, and EB are reviewed and discussed. Next, the methodological procedures are presented. Then, results are shown and discussed and limitations and suggestions for further studies are presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews and discusses the literature considered relevant for the proposed research – the studies on the generational issue and the concepts of employer attractiveness and employer branding.

Studies about the generational issue have increased substantially in the academic and managerial literature (Ansoorian, Good & Samuelson, 2003; Benson & Brown, 2011; Constanza et al., 2012; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). The key premise that guides most of these works is that there might be significant differences between generations currently in the labor market, which could cause not only a greater degree of conflict in the workplace, but could also bring the need for rethinking people management practices, such as recruitment, compensation, development, performance assessment, and feedback, among others.

In fact, the generational issue has been the research subject in different areas, such as the study of social movements and families and, even more frequently, in consumer segmentation studies (Parry & Urwin, 2010). In general, these works depart from the definition of generation proposed by Mannheim (1993), who emphasizes the importance of social location, i.e. a generation would comprise individuals who have experienced the same facts or relevant historical events during their socialization process, which will influence their perceptions, values, and ways of thinking (Mannheim, 1993). Parry and Urwin (2010) remind us that generations end up forming bonds and recognizing themselves through shared cultural symbols, such as music, fashion, movies, etc.

Studies point out that at least three generations interact in the workplace today, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Most of these studies, however, have been conducted in countries such as the United States (Constanza et al., 2012; Mencl & Lester, 2014) and Canada (Ng et al., 2010), in Europe (Parry & Urwin, 2010) and in Australia and New Zealand (Benson & Brown, 2011; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Treuren & Anderson, 2010), among others. Thus, some authors have emphasized that the existing literature may not adequately reflect specificities of other contexts, such as the Brazil (see, for instance, Rocha-de-Oliveira, Piccinini & Bittencourt, 2012).

Research results have shown that Baby Boomers grew up within a positive and optimistic period (Kupperschmidt, 2000); they appreciate learning new skills, personal development, and creativity; they work hard and seek extrinsic rewards and status, in exchange for their loyalty and commitment (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). In Brazil, this generation experienced the oppression of the military dictatorship and a

period of economic growth and industrialization, followed by a period of economic stagnation, as well as the entrance of a greater number of women into the labor market. Generation X's characteristics include self-confidence and independence (Jurkiewicz, 2000). Individuals also demonstrate greater commitment to their careers rather than to their employers; they appreciate developing skills and prefer a balance between personal life and work rather than status and stability (Smola & Sutton, 2002). In Brazil, this generation has seen the rise of the yuppie philosophy, which greatly valued money; they grew up watching TV and under strong influence of the American culture after the opening of the Brazilian economy; they also experienced the re-engineering and downsizing movements at the workplace, the emergence of AIDS, and increased violence and drug use (Cordeiro, 2012).

However, it is Generation Y that has been the main focus of academic research in the last few years (Bolton et al., 2013; Terjesen et al., 2007; Tulgan, 2009). This generation has experienced a context of rapid growth of the Internet and technology development (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008), the war against terror (9/11), the fall of the Berlin Wall, and increased cultural diversity (Dries, Pepermans & De Kerpel, 2008). According to Ng et al. (2010), Generation Y has over-committed to work Baby Boomers as their parents, who have often been fired during downsizing processes. Concerning work, studies found that these individuals have personal motivations that prioritize pleasure, focus on individual interests, and stimulation (novelties, changes, and challenges) (Reis et al., 2010); they want fast promotions (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Ng et al., 2010); they seek flexibility, quality of life, recognition, continued feedback, and positive environments and relationships at the workplace (Cavazotte et al., 2012; Ng et al., 2010); they assign lower centrality to work and appreciate extrinsic rewards, such as wage (Twenge, 2010). In Brazil, this generation grew up with greater economic stability, mass consumption, and a greater integration into the international scenario (Cordeiro, 2012).

Some studies have investigated work-related differences between generations. Cennamo and Gardner (2008) pointed out differences in terms of status (influence and responsibility levels) and freedom (autonomy at work), which are more valued by Generation Y. Twenge et al. (2010) found that younger generations place a higher value on leisure at work and, along these lines, Smola and Sutton (2002) found that younger generations place less value on work for its own sake and present lower work centrality. In Mencl and Lester (2014), differences emerged regarding career advancement opportunities, diversity climate, and immediate recognition and feedback, also more valued by Generation Y. Other studies found that Baby Boomers tend to feel more satisfied and identified with their work and less likely to quit (Benson and Brown, 2011; Constanza et al., 2012; Veloso et al., 2008). Silva et al. (2010) found that Baby Boomers and Generation Y

tend to pursue less traditional careers than Generation X and the study by Lester et al. (2012) indicate that the differences perceived between generations (how a generation sees the other) are greater than the differences identified through actual values declared. Thus, the idea that "older workers are rigid and inflexible, younger workers are irresponsible and entitled, and the workers in the middle are misunderstood by both younger and older generations" (Lester et al., 2012, p. 351) still remains.

However, some authors contend that these differences should be carefully analyzed because they could be, in fact, due to other factors such as aging, working experience, life and professional career stage (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Jorgensen, 2003; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Constanza et al., 2012; Parry & Urwin, 2010). Moreover, studies have found more similarities than differences among generations (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Constanza et al., 2012; Lester et al., 2012; Mencl & Lester, 2014).

Intergenerational differences have also been addressed through other dimensions, such as, e.g. personality profiles (Twenge et al., 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2008) and vocational interests of students (Bubany & Hansen, 2011). However, generational studies have not focused on employer attractiveness factors. A noticeable exception is the work of Terjesen et al. (2007), who investigated the importance of organizational attributes in the choice of employers; however, their study focused on undergraduate students, exclusively Generation Y.

2.1. Employer attractiveness, attractiveness attributes, and employer branding

Employer attractiveness has received considerable research attention in recent years (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Boswell, Roheling, LePine & Moynihan, 2003; Aiman-Smith, Bauer & Cable, 2001; Gatewood, Gowan & Lautenschlager, 1993), and it refers to the benefits that potential employees envisage they could get by working in a particular company (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005; Pingle & Sharma, 2013). Therefore, employer attractiveness influences the recruitment and selection processes (Gatewood et al., 1993) and the retention of professionals (Helm, 2013). Aiman-Smith et al. (2001, p.221) add that attractiveness refers to "an attitude or expressed general positive affect toward an organization, toward viewing the organization as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationship". The authors also indicate that attractiveness is revealed when people effectively seek for an opportunity to participate in the selection processes in a specific organization.

Developing an employer's attractiveness differs from the attraction stage in the recruitment process (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). While in the initial stage of the recruitment process the goal is to attract applicants for specific available positions at a given time, organization attractiveness must be continuously worked on, so that the company becomes a recognized and

attractive employer in the labor market; this will, in turn, facilitate the recruitment process (Collins & Stevens, 2002).

Attractiveness has been operationalized through the attractiveness attributes, the factors considered by potential candidates when choosing an employer (Berthon et al., 2005). These factors will be prioritized by applicants according to their respective needs and expectations (Cable & Turban, 2001).

Authors have proposed different approaches for research on these attributes. According to Lievens and Highhouse (2003), they may be instrumental and symbolic attributes, where the first refer to what the organization actually offers that is useful for the job seeker (e.g. salary package, flexible schedule, location, etc.). Symbolic attributes, in turn, represent subjective and intangible aspects (e.g. business innovation degree, culture, prestige, etc.). According to Cruise O'Brien (1995), attributes may be classified into cognitive/rational (reliability, competence, etc.) and affective/emotional (openness, support, attention, etc.). Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010) identified eight attributes reflecting characteristics of what an organization "offers" as an employer (global exposure, career opportunities, development, etc.) and what it "is" (flexible and ethical, reliable and fair, etc.). Furthermore, studies have shown that symbolic attributes may be specially relevant and differentiate more an employer from its competitors than instrumental attributes do (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2010).

Berthon et al. (2005) developed the Employer Attractiveness Scale, by integrating dimensions considered in other taxonomies, particularly, the functional, psychological, and economic aspects of attractiveness proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996). The scale comprises five attractiveness attributes and it assesses to what extent the organization offers the following values: 1) *Interest Value (IV)*: a challenging and stimulating job, with innovative working practices, products and services, in an environment that encourages creativity and innovation; 2) *Social Value (SV)*: a positive and pleasant social and interpersonal environment; 3) *Economic Value (EV)*: above- average wages, compensation package, job security, and promotion opportunities; 4) *Development Value (DV)*: provides recognition, self-worth and confidence, the development of skills and career-enhancing experiences; 5) *Application Value (AV)*: opportunity to apply expertise and convey knowledge to others, in a customer-oriented and humanitarian workplace.

Although the various proposals have different structures, in general, the attributes refer to the dimensions proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996). However, the scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005) has been more frequently used in subsequent studies (Alniaçik & Alniaçik, 2012; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Roy, 2008; Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen, 2013), suggesting a convergence in terms of attribute classification. And that is why we adopted this instrument in this study.

EB refers to the "sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work" (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 153). It involves applying branding principles to the recruitment and hiring process and focuses on the "package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by the employment and identified with employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187), in order to create differentiation from other employers, both to attract potential candidates and to motivate, engage, and retain current employees (Backaus & Tikoo, 2004).

According to Lievens (2007), EB involves three stages: in the first, a compelling and unique employer value proposition - the attributes or benefits to be offered to prospective and actual employees - is designed; in the second, this value proposition is communicated; and the third is the implementation stage, that is, to actually implement the promises made in the value proposition, in terms of the attraction attributes. EB relies on brand equity theories to analyze the influence of attractiveness attributes on people. Such theories focus on people's perceptions and beliefs concerning products and services brands, which influence their preference hierarchies (Collins & Stevens, 2002), and that increase the likelihood of differentiation from competitors. According to Cable and Turban (2001), brand equity principles may be extrapolated to the attraction and recruitment situation, where the choice among attractive employers will be made according the applicants' attributes preferences.

Therefore, EB strategies and activities contribute to organization attractiveness to the extent that they create, convey, and reinforce the positive aspects of the company as an employer (Collins & Kanar, 2013; Edwards, 2010). In addition, EB is not only about recruitment because "where traditional recruitment strategies are short-term, reactive, and subject to job openings, employment branding is a long-term strategy designed to maintain a steady flow of skills in the organisation" (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010, p. 26).

The premise behind EB strength and value derives from the benefits achieved from a strong brand: differentiation and loyalty. The brand must be able to differentiate, to create loyalty, to satisfy and establish an emotional connection with potential candidates (Davies, 2008). Thus, the value of a brand is associated with its awareness/recognition degree and the image it conveys to people. Besides differentiation and loyalty, EB can bring additional benefits to the organization, insofar as it provides a rationale to simplify management and to establish and focus on priorities, increasing productivity and improving recruitment, by ensuring a continued flow of adequate candidates (Holliday, 1997).

Attractiveness and prioritization of attractiveness attributes may vary according to the different cultures and demographic characteristics (Alniaçik, Alniaçik, Erat & Akçin, 2014; Newbury, Gardberg & Belkin, 2006) and, therefore, it is important to understand these aspects in relation to national contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to pursue the research objective - i.e. the identification of an employer attractiveness factors ranking for different generations - we chose to adopt a quantitative study that, according to Creswell (2003) provides a quantitative or numerical description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population.

3.1. Data collection and sample

For data collection, a recruitment firm's database was utilized. We invited 3,000 professionals to answer the online questionnaire. The questionnaire contained the Employer Attractiveness Scale and demographic questions. The return rate was about 34%, with a final number of 937 responses.

The sample consisted of professionals who work mainly in southeastern Brazil, 34% of them were women and 66% were men. In terms of hierarchical levels, there is a predominance of managers (42%), followed by coordinators/supervisors (19%) and directors (16%); analysts and specialists corresponded to 14% and 9% of the sample, respectively. As for the education level, 71.9% of the respondents are graduates and 24.5% have Higher Education. The average age was 37, ranging from 21 to 65 years. Regarding the distribution by generation, 42 (5%) are Baby Boomers, 606 (66%) are from Generation X, and 272 (30%) are from Generation Y.

The industry sectors more frequently represented in the sample (where the respondents worked in) were: Consumer goods (14.4%), Others (13.2%), Services (12.2%), and Technology and computing (11.8 %). Most professionals work in the finance (24.8%), IT (15.3%), HR (13.9%), and purchase/sales (11.5%) sectors.

3.2. Employer attractiveness scale validation

The survey employed the Employer Attractiveness Scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005). As mentioned, this instrument was chosen because it has already been employed by various international studies, showing good reliability (Alniaçik & Alniaçik, 2012; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Roy, 2008; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Wallace, Lings & Cameron, 2012). Furthermore, Sivertzen et al. (2013) found that the instrument involves employer attributes that influence a company's reputation and this, in turn, effectively influences the employer attractiveness among job seekers. Respondents must evaluate each item in the questionnaire through the following question: "How much is this aspect important to you when choosing a new job?" In this regard, a five-option Likert scale was used (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important).

A pretest with 6 human resources researchers was performed, in order to check and adjust the understanding of the translated scale. Then, in order to examine scale validity and

reliability, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. As a normal distribution was not observed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), partial least squares (PLS) estimation was adopted. At the first stage of the confirmatory analysis, convergent validity was addressed through average variance extracted (AVE). It is recommended that AVE is 0.50 or over (Hair et al., 2011). So, in order to maximize AVEs, we chose to delete two items of Economic Value and two of Development Value dimensions. Table 1 shows the indicators used in the study and the AVEs for each dimension. Table 1 also displays the reliability indicators (composite reliability) of each attractiveness dimension; as they are above 0.70, the reliability of dimensions was regarded as satisfactory (Hair et al., 2011).

Regarding the reliability of each indicator, although factor loadings of 0.70 or over are regarded as the most desirable, loadings between 0.50 and 0.70 are also acceptable and, in such cases, the items may still be maintained (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2011; Hulland, 1999). At this stage, we chose to delete the item having the lowest factor load (0.60), which was a Social Value item ("A fun working environment"). The choice also took into account the pre-tests with human resource researchers, who pointed out that this item might be redundant ("Happy work environment"). Finally, as shown in Table 1, the outer loadings of remaining indicators are all above 0.60.

Regarding discriminant validity, it was evaluated having two procedures as a basis. First, we checked the existence of cross loadings between the factors, which were not detected. Then, it was noticed that, as needed, the square roots of the AVEs were higher than the correlations between the factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Thus, discriminant validity was also regarded as satisfactory.

4. RESULTS

Table 2 shows the results obtained for the entire sample. It is observed that Development Value ($MM = 4.24$, $SD = 0.58$) and Economic Value ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.55$) had the highest mean scores, followed by Social Value ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.55$), Interest Value ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.62$), and Application Value ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.64$). The results also indicate correlations between dimensions, and the highest ones are those between Development Value and Social Value, Social Value and Interest Value, and Development Value and Interest Value.

As for gender (female = 0, male = 1), there is a significant and negative correlation with Development Value and Social Value; i.e. these factors are more appreciated by women than by men. Age (continued values), in turn, had a significant and positive relationship with Interest Value and negative with Economic Value, i.e. generally, the higher the age, the more people tend to appreciate the work itself and the less value is assigned to extrinsic rewards. Furthermore, the statistical significance of differences between the scores for attractiveness factors was tested by using the non-parametric

Table 1

Dimensions of the Employer Attractiveness Scale

Dimensions	Outer loadings
Interest Value (AVE: 0.60; composite reliability: 0.88)	
Working in a vibrant/challenging environment	0.81
Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking	0.83
The organization both values and makes use of your creativity	0.82
The organization produces high-quality products and services	0.73
The organization produces innovative products and services	0.66
Social Value (AVE: 0.51; composite reliability: 0.84)	
Having a good relationship with your colleagues	0.81
Having a good relationship with your superiors	0.70
Supportive and encouraging colleagues	0.72
Happy work environment	0.73
Application Value (AVE: 0.51; composite reliability: 0.84)	
Humanitarian organization – gives back to society	0.77
Opportunity to apply what was learned in college/university	0.65
Opportunity to teach others what you have learned	0.72
Acceptance and belonging	0.71
The organization is customer-orientated	0.72
Economic Value (AVE: 0.56; composite reliability: 0.79)	
Good promotion opportunities within the organization	0.89
An above average basic salary	0.69
An attractive overall compensation package	0.64
Development Value (AVE: 0.54; composite reliability: 0.78)	
Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organization	0.81
Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organization	0.64
Gaining career-enhancing experience	0.75

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations (Spearman)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Development Value	4.24	0.58	1						
2. Economic Value	4.23	0.55	.259**	1					
3. Social Value	4.10	0.55	.448**	.257**	1				
4. Interest Value	4.07	0.62	.335**	.252**	.441**	1			
5. Application Value	3.81	0.64	.017	.025	.015	.050	1		
6. Gender	-	-	-.130**	.006	-.082*	.055	-.016	1	
7. Age	37.04	8.23	-.042	-.184**	.025	.133**	-.032	.202**	1

** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.

Wilcoxon test, which is suitable to perform the comparison between means of related samples or between repeated measurements of the same sample, just as in the case of this analysis. To do this, the score of each attractiveness factor was paired with others. Thus, Table 3 shows comparisons between the scores for the sample as a whole, without considering the generational groups.

Considering altogether the results listed in tables 2 and 3, it is observed that Development Value ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.58$) had higher mean scores than Social Value ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.55$), Value of interest ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.62$), and Application Value ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.64$) and that these differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, Economic Value ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.58$) showed higher and significant average values related to Social Value, Interest Value, and Application Value. Nevertheless, the difference between Development Value and Economic Value, representing the two factors with higher average score values was not significant; so, it is observed that these two attributes are shown as the attractiveness factors most appreciated by respondents as a whole, without considering the generational differences. On the other hand, both the scores for Social Value and Interest Value were higher than the score for Application Value, with $p < 0.01$. The latter dimension was shown, therefore, as the attractiveness factor having the lowest weight for professionals as a whole. The scores for Social Value and Social interest did not register, however, a significant difference from each other.

Next, mean scores were determined on each attribute, for different generational group (Table 4). Comparisons were made between generations (Table 5), by using the Mann-Whitney test, with which the means of the three groups were compared, indicating which of them appreciate more or less each employer attributes.

In all generational comparisons, differences between means were significant for Economic Value. Thus, it is observed that Generation Y ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.55$) appreciates more this attribute than the others (Table 4); Generation X ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.49$), in turn, values it more than Baby Boomers ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.57$). This attribute involves aspects such as: salary above average, compensation package, security, and promotion opportunities.

It was also identified that Application Value is considered more relevant by Generation Y ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.78$) than by Baby Boomers ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.78$); this attribute comprises aspects such as opportunities to apply expertise and convey knowledge to others. It also involves the degree to which the job has an environment where application is aimed at the market and, at the same time, the society. Finally, the comparison between average values also indicated that Interest Value obtained higher scores among Baby Boomers ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.52$) and Generation X ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.61$) than Generation Y ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.64$). This dimension is related to a challenging and stimulating job, with new working practices, innovative products and services, in an environment

Table 3

General Comparisons Between the Average Scores of Attractiveness Factors

Comparisons									
DV x EV	DV x SV	DV x IV	DV x AV	EV x SV	EV x IV	EV x AV	SV x IV	SV x AV	IV x AV
-0.68	-7.44*	-7.79*	-14.01	-4.9*	-5.98*	-13.81*	-1.9	-10.22*	-8.8*

Obs.: Values in the cells represent Z in the Wilcoxon test, where: * $p < 0.01$. DV = Development Value; EV = Economic Value; SV = Social Value; IV = Interest Value; AV = Application Value.

Table 4

Mean Scores for Generational Groups and Attractiveness Factors

	N	Development Value		Economic Value		Social Value		Interest Value		Application Value	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Baby Boomers	42	4.22	0.57	4.02	0.57	4.19	0.41	4.26	0.52	3.57	0.78
Generation X	606	4.22	0.58	4.18	0.49	4.10	0.56	4.09	0.61	3.80	0.64
Generation Y	272	4.28	0.57	4.36	0.55	4.10	0.55	3.99	0.64	3.87	0.61

that encourages creativity and innovation. Differences between the scores for Development Value and Social Value were not significant.

Next, attractiveness factors within each generational group were compared by using the Wilcoxon test (Table 6), in order to verify to what extent the differences between scores for each group are statistically significant. This analysis enabled us to identify whether the attractiveness attributes were effectively discriminated/differentiated and prioritized – i.e. whether some attributes were perceived as more or less important than others - in each generation. By highlighting the discrimination and appreciation of employer attractiveness factors, we can

identify their potential to set an employer value proposition and an employer brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Cable & Turban, 2001), from the viewpoint of each generation.

On the one hand, Table 4 indicates that Baby Boomers prioritize Interest Value ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.52$), Development Value ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.57$), and Social Value ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.41$); they value less Economic Value ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.57$) and Application Value ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.78$). On the other hand, Table 6 shows that Baby Boomers had only five significant differences in comparisons between the attributes' scores (out of ten possible comparisons): between Application

Table 5

Comparison Between Generational Groups

Comparisons	Development Value	Economic Value	Social Value	Interest Value	Application Value
Baby Boomers versus Generation X	12512.50	10142.00**	11999.00	10723.50	10637.50
Baby Boomers versus Generation Y	5313.50	3726.00*	5293.00	4278.50*	4513.00**
Generation X versus Generation Y	77768.00	66662.00*	81693.00	74810.00**	78193.00

Obs.: Values in the cells represent U in the Mann-Whitney test, where: * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$.

Table 6

Comparison of Attractiveness Factors, by Generation

Comparisons	Baby Boomers N = 42	Generation X N = 606	Generation Y N = 272
DV x EV	-1.39	-1.37	-3.52*
DV x SV	-0.13	-5.64*	-5.01*
DV x IV	-0.81	-5.16*	-6.94*
DV x AV	-3.67*	-11.29*	-7.35*
EV x SV	-1.17	-2.72*	-6.80*
EV x IV	-2.01**	-2.99*	-8.79*
EV x AV	-3.05*	-9.06*	-9.49*
SV x IV	-1.23	-0.81	-2.81*
SV x AV	-3.72*	-8.55*	-4.37*
IV x AV	-4.20*	-8.00*	-2.23**

Obs.: Values in the cells represent Z in the Wilcoxon test, where: * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$. DV = Development Value; EV = Economic Value; SV = Social Value; IV = Interest Value; AV = Application Value.

Value and Interest Value; between Application Value and Social Value; between Application Value and Economic Value; between Application Value and Development Value; and, finally, between Interest Value and Economic Value. Furthermore, there are significant differences between Application Value and the others, having this attribute achieved the lowest score in the Baby Boomers group.

Also according to Table 4, respondents from Generation X had higher scores for Development Value ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.58$) and Economic Value ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.49$); then, there are Social Value ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.56$) and Interest Value ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.61$); the lowest score was for Application Value ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.64$). Table 6, in turn, indicates that, for Generation X, most comparisons between the scores were significant. The two exceptions, with no significant differences, were the comparisons between: Development Value and Economic Value; and Social Value and Interest Value. These attribute pairs are equivalent in terms of importance, for this generation. It is relevant to note that this generational group showed greater discrimination of the studied attractiveness attributes than Baby Boomers.

As shown in Table 4, members of Generation Y, in turn, assigned greater importance to: Economic Value ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.55$) and Development Value ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.57$); it is followed by Social Value ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.55$) and Interest Value ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.64$); the lowest score was for Application Value ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.61$). Since all differences were significant, the results indicate a well-defined ranking of priorities, distinguishing all attributes from each other. Through the comparisons between generational groups it is noted that younger people have clearer and more marked preferences regarding attractiveness factors; on the other hand, these preferences tend to be less marked for Baby Boomers.

5. DISCUSSION

Initially, mean scores for attractiveness factors were examined for the sample as a whole (tables 2 and 3). The results pointed out that all dimensions of the attractiveness scale seem to be relevant for the group of professionals under study, taking into account that the lowest score achieved was 3.81 (Application Value). The high scores found may reflect the importance that all factors of the Employer Attractiveness Scale have for the recruitment process, a finding that is consistent with the results of previous studies on employer attractiveness, in topics such as work values and the meaning of work (Parry & Urwin, 2010; Dose, 1997; Morin, 2001; MOW, 1987), job and career expectations (Twenge et al., 2010; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Dries et al., 2008), among others. This finding is also aligned with Deal et al. (2010, p. 196) that emphasize that it is advisable to be attentive to all employees: "If you provide employees with an interesting job, good compensation, opportunities to learn and advance, colleagues they like to

work with, a boss they trust, and leaders who are competent, employees of all generations will respond positively". What this article reinforces, however, is that such aspects are, in fact, observed and taken into account by job seekers; all of these elements (or only some of them) may be emphasized on EB strategies, since they can come to influence the preference for an employer over another. On the other hand, even if all factors seem to be relatively important, it was possible to determine differences between them. In fact, Development Value and Economic Value were more valued than Social Value, Interest Value, and Application Value by the sample as a whole.

However, although these findings are supported by the literature, some considerations are important, to put them in perspective. First, it should be noted that EB strategies seek to focus on specific attributes - rather than on all attributes at the same time - taking into account characteristics of the addressed audiences (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). This justifies the stratification by age, gender, etc., which highlights the expectations prioritized by each group. Second, the employed instrument (Berthon et al., 2005) may have limitations usually related to questionnaires that do not adopt forced-choice scales; e.g. occasionally respondents might assign higher scores to the assessed dimensions because they perceive all dimensions as positive/desirable (see, for instance, Braunscheidel, Suresh & Boisnier, 2010), eventually increasing mean scores globally. However, this potential bias was managed through the comparisons between generational segments, which focused on differences between groups rather than on absolute results. Furthermore, when the three generations under study were compared, insightful nuances emerged, providing additional information that can be explored in EB initiatives, taking into account specific traits of these three groups.

In fact, comparisons between groups (tables 4 and 5) indicated differences between them. The most significant ones concern Economic Value, which seems to have a decreasing importance from younger to older generations, a finding which is consistent with studies that analyze generations already entered into the workplace (Chen & Choi, 2008; Ng et al., 2010). The Application Value, which involves being able to put into practice and sharing what has been learned, was also more appreciated by Generation Y, and it was decreasing for older generations. The reverse happens with Interest Value, where differences were identified between Generation Y and Baby Boomers and between Generation Y and Generation X; i.e. more experienced respondents seem to prefer employers who offer an environment with challenges, with new working practices and innovative products, and also a creative and innovative environment. This result does not align with studies showing that younger generations' values tend to prioritize novelties, changes, and challenges (e.g. Reis et al., 2010). This contradiction might suggest that, despite the importance of such values, when choosing the employer these generations can combine them to other parameters (the need to become

financially established, for instance) in order to rank company attributes; later on, as an employee, other expectations with regard to the employer and the workplace could emerge, resetting priorities. Therefore, it may be suggested that further studies examine how such prioritization evolve over time.

Another interesting finding refers to differences within each of these three groups (tables 4 and 6). The results show that, for Baby Boomers, Interest Value is more important than the other attributes (including economic value) when choosing an employer. This may align with studies suggesting that this individuals from this generation tend to be committed to work (Gursoy et al., 2008; Dries et al., 2008), since they seem to primarily prefer an employer that offers an interesting and innovative job, developed within an equally creative environment. Development Value is also an attractiveness factor that stands out; this attribute is related to the fact that an employer provides professional development and career growth opportunities. Application Value, on the other hand, is the least important attribute for this group.

Among respondents from Generation X, the following attributes were prioritized: Development Value and Economic Value, followed by Social Value and Interest Value and, finally, by Application Value. These results are consistent with previous research, which describe the members of this generation as more independent and less committed to the organization - and this can also lead to greater interest in Development Value - and they like to earn rewards quickly (Gursoy et al., 2008; Appelbaum et al., 2005). Regarding Generation Y, there were well marked differences in their preferences as for employer attributes; they ranked the attributes in the following order (from the most to the least valued): Economic Value => Development Value => Social Value => Interest Value => Application Value. This finding is supported by studies showing that this generation prioritizes extrinsic rewards, development opportunities, and the workplace itself (Cavazotte et al., 2012; NG et al., 2010; Twenge, 2010; Veloso et al., 2008).

In fact, differences were observed with regard to how each generation discriminates and ranks the various employer attributes (Table 6), and such ranking is clearer in Generation Y and more diffuse among Baby Boomers. As an example of this diffusion among more experienced professionals, we notice they do not distinguish significantly, for example, between Development Value and Social Value, or Economic Value and Social Value (Table 5), among others. Seemingly, this group tends to prioritize more clearly and focus on Interest Value when choosing an employer; most of the other attributes, although relevant, have no greater differentiation from each other, thus losing impact on employer value proposition and EB strategies (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Berthon et al, 2005). Interest Value constitutes a primarily symbolic attribute (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), connected to what the organization "is" (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010), and might be the most emphasized one to recruit professionals from this group.

Younger generations (especially Generation Y), in turn, seem to be more sensitive with regard to various employer attributes, distinguishing them more clearly. Among these groups, a broader range of attributes can be considered and combined aiming at brand equity and EB strategies configuration (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Kanar, 2013). Rewards, development opportunities, and social environment are attributes that could be emphasized in the value proposition focused on this segment. So, what we observe is that EB initiatives could be customized, according to the generation addressed by the company.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to identify employer attractiveness attributes prioritized by Baby Boomers and generations X and Y. Survey results provide insights for designing EB strategies aimed at people from different generations who, as we can see, prioritize attributes in different ways. For Baby Boomers, it is suggested to prioritize issues such as the possibility of pursuing an innovative job, in a positive workplace, which encourages creativity and new working practices, besides providing personal development opportunities. For Generation X, it may be interesting to emphasize development opportunities, combined to a good compensation package, but also offer the opportunity to work in a stimulating and creative workplace and have good relationships at work. Finally, to attract people from Generation Y, it seems clearer that the rewards package is very relevant, as well as the development opportunities and a positive workplace. Furthermore, the results confirm the claim by Newbury et al. (2006) that attractiveness is "in the eyes of the beholder" and, therefore, contextual and demographic characteristics such as gender, race, age, education, and income influence people's perceptions on organizations' attractiveness.

By examining attractiveness attributes, this paper contributes to the literature by providing a different viewpoint on generations. Many studies on career and values at the workplace examine what people expect for a career and an indefinite/generic job, over a lifetime (Cordeiro, 2012; Ng et al., 2010; Morin, 2001; MOW, 1987). The survey on attractiveness, in turn, brings the question to the moment of the job choice, i.e., it examines the prioritization of attributes that are offered by employers, at a particular stage of someone's life. Besides, it highlights specific traits of each generation, identifying the preference for certain attributes and differences in the attractiveness factors prioritization. Mapping these characteristics may contribute to set an employer brand within each generational segment, in order to attract the best talents (Turban & Cable, 2003). A limitation of this study is its focus on southeastern Brazil and on a population with high education level, thus it does not represent the reality of the Brazilian population as a whole; further studies may cover a more diversified sample, better representing the Brazilian population.

Moreover, as aforementioned, the instrument used (Berthon et al., 2005) may show limitations typically associated with scales that do not adopt forced-choice items, and this could increase scores globally; this aspect is mitigated, however, in analyses focusing on comparisons between groups. Another aspect is that the survey was cross-sectional; so, it does not examine the phenomenon of attractiveness over time, leading to new questions: To what extent do the attributes valued by people actually turn into their employment choices? Moreover: Do they vary over time? Do they contribute to retain professionals? These aspects may be investigated in further studies; also, a

longitudinal approach could bring additional insights to the theme. Further research could also examine the impact of attractiveness factors on the psychological contract with hired employees: Which are the implications? Which expectations emerge with regard to EB? This is a particularly relevant aspect: attractiveness attributes incorporated into EB strategies make sense only when reflecting the employer's reality and when they are, in fact, provided to the employee, as a part of the actual experience within the company she/he works in (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Cable & Turban, 2001; Edwards & Edwards, 2013; Martin et al., 2011). ♦

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ABSTRACT

Employer Attractiveness from a Generational Perspective: Implications for Employer Branding

This study aimed to identify the employer attractiveness factors prioritized by different generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. The survey was conducted with a sample of 937 professionals, working in various areas and companies, most of them were managers and had a high education level. The Employer Attractiveness Scale proposed by Berthon et al. (2005) was adopted and the results indicate that, when choosing a company, the generations under study have specific features regarding the attractiveness attributes they prioritize. It was also observed that Generation Y discriminates and ranks such attributes more clearly than the others. Possible implications for employer branding and research limitations are discussed at the end of the article.

Keywords: employer attractiveness, recruitment, generations, employer branding.

RESUMEN

Atractivo como Empleador en Perspectiva Generacional: Implicaciones en el Employer Branding

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar los factores del atractivo como empleador priorizados por diferentes generaciones: *Baby Boomers*, Generación X y Generación Y. La encuesta se realizó con una muestra de 937 profesionales, que trabajan en diferentes áreas y empresas, en su mayoría gerentes y con altos niveles de educación. Fue adoptada la Escala del Atractivo como Empleador de Berthon et al. (2005) y los resultados indican que, al elegir una empresa, las generaciones estudiadas tienen especificidades con relación a los atributos de atractivo que priorizan. También se observó que la generación Y es aquella que más claramente discrimina y jerarquiza dichos atributos. Posibles implicaciones en el *employer branding* y limitaciones de la investigación se discuten al final del artículo.

Palabras clave: atractivo como empleador, reclutamiento, generaciones, *employer branding*.

COMO REFERENCIAR ESTE ARTIGO

(De acordo com as normas da *American Psychological Association* [APA])

Reis, G. G., & Braga, B. M. (2016, janeiro/fevereiro/março). Employer attractiveness from a generational perspective: Implications for employer branding. *Revista de Administração* [RAUSP], 51(1), 103-116. doi:10.5700/rausp1226